A Five-Year-Old’s Unimaginable Journey

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by

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in 1995-2000, Infancy, The life of mine

I sometimes wonder whether I truly remember that day or if the memories were stitched together later by the voices of the people around me fragments of their fear, their shock, their grief blending into my own. It was March 12th, 2000. I was returning from school with my Amma walking along a newly constructed highway toward Bangalore. The sun, the dust, the brand-new smell of the asphalt none of those details mattered in the end. What mattered was the government bus that lost control and crashed the tractor befor.

It didn't come crashing into us with monstrous force the way accidents are shown in movies. It was almost gentle a "light clash," people later said, first brushing against a tractor and then barely touching us. But even a touch from something that huge carries a kind of violence. I fell hard onto the road. Amma was thrown into a nearby pit. My skin stung with scratches but Amma's legs were badly hurt. In that moment, I didn't understand what had happened. I was five pain didn't make sense yet. Fear didn't have a shape.

We were taken to Vijaya Nursing Home for first aid. I still remember the strange stillness inside me while writing about it now the strange ache imagining what Amma must have felt, the sharp agony of her injuries and the deeper quieter ache of what Appa must have gone through when he heard that his wife and little daughter had been in an accident. Parents break in ways children never see.

At the hospital the doctors advised taking me to Bangalore for further tests. I was walking to the restroom, talking, moving doing all the ordinary things a child does. After the initial treatment we went to St. John's Hospital. The next day when the nurse tried to inject me something felt wrong. I didn't cry, I didn't even move. That tiny moment my stillness opened the door to a terrifying truth no one was prepared for.

They sent me for an MRI and more tests. The results arrived like a storm that no one could outrun. I had lost sensation my little body had gone silent. I was paralyzed.

I can’t imagine what it must have done to my parents. They walked into that day thinking they had a daughter who could run and play and climb…and suddenly they were being told that their child might never walk again. They tried everything carrying reports from one hospital to another begging for hope from multispecialty experts searching for even a sliver of possibility. But the answer was always the same the spinal cord those delicate hair-thin nerves connecting brain to body had been harmed. Not the bones those could be fixed but the nerves which operate like threads in a fragile web. One wrong move during surgery could damage something else no treatment existed.

The fall on the new highway had done something invisible but irreversible.

I spent nearly a month in the hospital. I didn’t understand the enormity of what was happening. I was just a child playing with a big round ball, laughing with my grandma, unaware that my world had shifted forever. Everything in my life flipped upside down in those five years.

After a month I was discharged and taken home. I rested for a year a child learning to live in a body that no longer obeyed her. And then slowly the world pushed forward. I was admitted to Jennifer School for first grade. Life didn’t pause even though mine had been changed forever.